852 553 Three days after the birth of a male child, or four days in the case of a daughter, the father and mother invite the relatives to come and rejoice over the new addition to the family. On that day the baby's forehead is shaved in a circle, and he is given a name. The husband's sisters or his other wives choose a name for the first child, and the father himself chooses the names of the others.

551 The name is derived from an event which preceded, attended, or followed the birth. If the mother ever happened to kill a chicken, even by mistake, even in her childhood, her first child is called by the generic name for chickens (noara), or else he will die. If the father or mother have seen two snakes in the same spot, the child will bear the name Ganda. If several previous children died, the newborn takes the name Yéwaya, "he has come." If several reasons for specific names concur, for instance, if he should be named Noara, Ganda, Yéwaya, he is called Ywawa, "one with many names." A child often bears the name of an older sibling with the addition of the adjective Bila, "little, younger." Thus, if the older child is called Tibo, the younger one is called Tibila (Tibo Bila, "the little Tibo fetish"). In other words, names are not given haphazardly. Some names are rather pretty: Zuényendé, "he is shy"; Nongabamba, "she loves them (her parents)"; Danimmamyé, "forget me not." Sometimes the name merely indicates the child's sex: Daore, "male"; Poko, "female"; or else the festive occasion or day of the week when the child was born.

304 Just as names are not given haphazardly, tattoos do not vary without reason. The native tattooing consists basically of three parallel lines on each side of the face, running vertically across the cheek from the temples to the chin, with a fourth line leading from the nose perpendicularly to the other three and crossing the cheek horizontal hatching between them, like a ladder; this is the mark of free men and of chiefs' sons. The three vertical lines may also be interrupted halfway down the cheek by three horizontal stripes, and then continue down to the chin; this is the mark of a child who was born [844] among the Peul because his older siblings had died and the sorcerer had decreed that his mother should give birth among the Peul. This [197] tattooing is characteristic of a distinct Mossi tribe, which lives among them but speaks a different language—the Marensé, better known as Marka. If a child has a Yarga /Yarse/ mother or grandmother, he will bear one horizontal stripe on the right cheek in addition to the three vertical lines /on each cheek/; this is the Yarsé tattooing.

304 Children are tattooed at any age, sometimes when already grown. Many Yarsé do not tattoo their children, and the Mossi themselves do not seem especially to hold to this barbarous custom which sometimes disfigures an individual. The tattooing is done with a razor, and powdered charcoal is put into the wounds. In order to soften the skin and to alleviate the pain, the whole face is covered with oil until the wounds are healed, leaving more or less accentuated scars depending on the success of the operation. Some natives are completely disfigured by thick excrescences of flesh as the result of a faulty operation.

Sorcerers sometimes have the strange idea of prescribing tattoo marks on the belly or lower back of children whose older siblings have [789] died. For instance, a woman had lost three of her children. She consulted a sorcerer when the fourth was born, and he declared with the greatest seriousness that the child would die if his buttocks were not marked with stripes and his belly with tattooings radiating from the navel. The child was marked accordingly, and he lived! Young girls nearly always tattoo their belly with lines extending radially from the navel; many adorn their chest above the bosom with small stripes running perpendicular to the breasts and parallel between them. The tattooing patterns we have described here are, of course, only the most widespread types, because there is a great variety of markings.

304 852 [184] Just as there is no set age for tattooing, there is none for circumcision. Children of seven or eight are circumcised along with youths and even mature men. Circumcision does not seem to be a Mossi custom, for it is not a general practice. In Ouagadougou province most children are circumcised, while in Koupéla province most of them are not. However, the custom is gaining yearly in Koupéla. The head of the family often has himself circumcised because he is ill, and his children follow suit. Thus circumcision is introduced into the family, for once the father has undergone the operation, his children do likewise. Sometimes the mother is a Yarga, thus from a Moslem family, and her children are circumcised, a new gain for the practice. It also happens that children are drawn to it through sheer curiosity and the enticing assurances of the Peul and Yarsé, who are usually Moslems and thus circumcised, and who spread propaganda all around them. Excision, on the other hand, is universal.

304 563 852

/42/ When there is a group to be circumcised, their relatives set a date with the Peul who is to perform the operation. At dawn of that

304 day the one in charge of the circumcision, a wealthy Yarga or Mossi
563 who has the means to feed several of the people to be circumcised,
852 chooses a tree to serve as shelter for the operation. Rain need not be taken into account, for circumcision is always performed during the dry season from December to April, when agricultural work is at a standstill. The tree is surrounded with straw mats, forming the téoo [778] or sacred enclosure which no one who is not circumcised may come near without running the risk of being insulted and often beaten; if he should dare to step inside it, he would be stricken by the greatest misfortunes. The Peul sets out a flat stone, sacrifices a chicken in order to make the spirit of the tree benevolent toward those to be circumcised, and operates on the boys one by one. Drums are played throughout the operation to drown the cries of the victims.

852 For three days afterwards the newly circumcised boys do nothing. They rest and tend their wounds. They remain isolated from the rest [535] of the community for two or three months, sometimes even longer. Judging by the dances which close the festivities, dancing must be their primary concern during that period of time. They also thresh the millet of those who invite them to do so, but no uncircumcised person may join them, no uninitiated individual may come near them. [198] They do not speak the Mossi language at this time, but a special tongue of which they learn enough to serve them in their everyday needs. Woe to those who forget and use their native tongue; they are [551] beaten with switches made of a kind of willow. Even their names are changed, and no one may call them by their Mossi names.

The circumcised boys are divided in two groups, one "male" and one "female." One of the groups bears the name of the hyena (kwara in their language) and the other is called masalro, whose French equivalent we do not know. The hyena group must strain their wits to snatch food, even from the other circumcised boys, who are kept constantly on the alert. The other group makes improper gestures during the dance.

852 The circumcised boys are covered with gray dust to alter their
293 appearance completely. A tail is fastened to the back of their breech-
776 cloth, hanging to the ground. It is made of plaited cotton thread and
481 ends in a pompon. Its function is to drive off the kikirsi spirits, who apparently do not like circumcised persons. The boys walk bent over and leaning on sticks like old men. This is done to test their obedience and to see if they listen carefully to what they are told.

852 When they go into the bush, either to cut down straw or for any other reason, they sing invocations to the spirits of the paths and of the trees in order to propitiate them, to draw their blessing, and to avert illness. They chase everyone in their path, approach the villages, and, if they can, seize a few chickens, goats, or sheep as an extra tidbit. This is the custom, and they even steal the animals of their relatives in this fashion. At night they come up near the huts and beat everyone they meet; they take everything they can find, and no one would think of resisting them. /43/ In any case, during that time, people take good care of their children and send them plenty of food. To have a child undergoing circumcision is a burden to a family.

852 563 869 When the circumcised group consists largely of Moslems, Yarsé or Peul, the one in charge of the circumcision assembles them during rest periods, in the evening, or sometimes in the middle of the night, in order to instruct them. There does not seem to be any esoteric doctrine, and the instructions deal with the glorification of ancestors who were also circumcised there. Only those who are circumcised can enter heaven and have many children; those who are not will taste no happiness in the other life and will remain sterile. The group is also taught that God sits under a black tree on a sheep skin, that he eats from a dish and drinks from a bottle. It is all very childish. They are also told that they must not disclose to anyone, under penalty of death or at least of serious illness, what they have seen and learned during the circumcision period. This is to prevent them from revealing the robberies committed during that time and from discouraging those who should like to undergo the operation; for although it is tempting to eat well, to play a great deal, and especially to wear beautiful clothes, it is also unpleasant to be lashed with willows at the slightest slip, or for not dancing well, for quarreling with or insulting someone, for speaking Mossi, for being slow to go to work.

852 Occasionally, at circumcision time, two sticks are found on the path near the market. They were placed there on purpose, and if one looks to the right and left, he will see two children, all covered with dust and wearing dirty breechcloths. They are newly circumcised boys who are begging, and passersby drop a few cowries to the ground.

852 302 All these ceremonies are soon to end. The clothes are ready, and the children are getting tired and restive. The one in charge of the circumcision decides that the boys are to be shaved, that is, that the circumcision period will end in two weeks. The hair of the circumcised boys is not shaved off completely: strips of hair alternate with

852 [302] shaved strips on top of the head, while the sides are shaved similarly in semi-circular strips. On the seventh day, people who were previously circumcised bring chickens to sacrifice to the spirits of the paths so that all will go well, but the newly circumcised take no part in the proceedings. The children wash, oil themselves, and put on their beautiful clothes. Everything is brand new, the breechcloth, the trousers, the shirt, the blanket, and the headgear. The belt is adorned with a knife in a leather sheath and with a needle case which has at the end a tuft of leather strips with cowries attached to them. They hold a cow's tail, also adorned with cowries, to drive off the scheuyan spirits who dislike little rascals and people who dress too well. Both wrists are adorned with copper bracelets. Needless to say, this flashy new outfit with its cowries that clang like bells lures the eye and bewitches the young boys, who decide to be circumcised at the first opportunity so they too may eat well and wear beautiful clothes.

852 [48] /44/ The circumcised boys continue to walk bent over, leaning on their sticks, but their crude staff is replaced with two sticks decorated with burnt designs and tied together. They no longer wear a tail. They go to greet the chiefs, and they thank those who have given them gifts. They walk to the sound of the large drum, since the bindré is forbidden at circumcision ceremonies, and sing plaintive chants to the spirits. They parade in the marketplace and display their clothes in the villages. They dance before the chiefs, and their dances are very graceful indeed. They dance in unison to the beat of the drum, making the same gestures all together or two by two, varying the figures in accordance with the beat. After seven days the festivities are over, and they all return to their families and take up everyday life as though nothing had happened.

We shall now study this everyday life.

/45/ BOOK III. DAILY WORK AND TRADES

Chapter 1. Occupations of a Mossi

221 241 The Mossi are essentially cultivators, and it may be said that no Mossi who works at a trade will fail to cultivate his fields when the

12:Skinner E-4,5 (1955-1957) 1962
FA28 Mossi FA28

When a woman has a number of stillbirths or
845 loses her children when they are still babies, however, it is believed
761 than these children were embodiments of the same *kinkirsi* (spirits)
776 who must be tricked into remaining on earth when it returns, and
443 the market place is chosen as the site for this trickery. As soon as such
851 a woman gives birth to a child, and old woman places it in a basket
443 and on the next market day takes it to the market place. Her intention is to "sell" the child in the hope that it would not die if owned by someone other than its mother. The old woman walks around the market place shouting: "I have something to sell!" Invariably a man will walk up to her, and after ascertaining the contents of the basket, offer to buy it. The price varies with the fortune of the man, but traditionally the amount paid has been 500 cowries or their equivalent. The man takes the child for a few minutes and then returns it to its vendor, telling her in a loud voice so that the kinkirsi will hear: "I would like you to give this child to 'X' (the child's mother) to be reared for me and I will pay for its upbringing and will come
[551] for the child in a few years. He then gives the child the name *Yamba*
[553] (slave), or *Yemdaogo* (male slave) if male and *Yempoko* (female slave) if a girl. The old woman then returns the child to its mother, relating what has passed in the market and indicating who the "owner" of her child is. The "owner" of the child may not even see the child again, and naturally does not take this ownership seriously. In many cases the money with which he bought the child was given to him by the child's father.

852 The market also plays an important part in the circumcision and
443 incision ceremonies of Mossi boys and girls. For about two to three months after the actual operations the young children, especially the boys are secluded in the circumcision lodges or compounds and have almost no contact with the village population. Their re-introduction to society always takes place on the great market day. The parents of the children buy new clothing for them this occasion, and on the appointed day the boys or girls parade together in the market and are offered gifts by the market people. Later in the day, they are dismissed and individually feted by their relatives.

585 Owing to the relatively unceremonious nature of Mossi marriages,
76 the market does not play a role in Mossi weddings. However, the
554 same thing cannot be said about the last important *rite de passage*,
443 especially the funeral of a chief, or important elder. Prior to the intervention of the French, and to a lesser extent even today, the announcement of the death of an important ruler was seen as the breakdown of law and order and was ritually dramatized by a popular raid
[565] on the markets throughout the territories (Skinner : ms). During the interregnum the vendors are subject to constant raids by members of